

AN URARTIAN BRACELET FROM GILAN^{*}

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Within the last few years considerable progress is being observed in the study of political history, economy, culture, and the religion of the Urartian Empire (9-7th cc. B. C.).

This is in particular stipulated by the fact that we are becoming more and more informed with regard to the civilisation of Urartu; large-scale excavations are being deployed, both inside the Republic of Armenia (the Lake Sevan Basin, etc.)¹, in Western Armenia, nowadays Turkey (Çavuştepe, Kef Kalesi of Adilcevaz, Körzüt, Van, Ayanis, etc.)², and outside Armenia, in the former Urartian lands in North-Western Iran.³ As a result the corpus of the Urartian cuneiform inscriptions is being replenished continually: a fairly recent publication described an Assyro-Urartian bilingual stele from Movana found at about 32 km to the west from Urmia city;⁴ publications were made of the newly found inscriptions in Muş, Elazığ, Çavuştepe, Ayanis, Sandık-daşı (Shisheh) and Gövelek,⁵ as well as the deficient text by the

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¹ See, e. g., R. Biscione, S. Hmayakyan, N. Parmegiani (eds.), *The North-Eastern Frontier, Urartians and Non-Urartians in the Sevan Lake Basin: I. The Southern Shores (Documenta Asiana VII)*, Roma, 2002.

² A. Çilingiroğlu, M. Salvini (eds.), *Ayanis I. Ten Years Excavations at Rusahinili Eiduru-kai, 1989-1998 (Documenta Asiana IV)*, Roma, 2001; M. Salvini, "Progetto Urartu. Turchia-Riconizioni epigrafiche", *Studi Micenei ed Egeo-Anatolici (SMEA)*, XLIV/2, 2002: 364-371; etc.

³ Cf., e. g., R. Biscione, M. Salvini, "Progetto Urartu. An Archaeological-Philological Research Travel of ISMEA in Eastern and Western Azerbaijan, Iran, 18th May-1st June 2000", *SMEA*, XLII/2, 2000: 312-319; R. Biscione, N. Parmegiani, "Progetto Urartu: Iran. Italian-Iranian Archaeological Mission in the Province of Ahar, Eastern Azerbaijan", *SMEA*, XLIV/2, 2002: 361-363.

⁴ B. André-Salvini, M. Salvini, "The Bilingual Stele of Rusa I from Movana (West-Azerbaijan, Iran)", *SMEA*, XLIV/1, 2002: 5-66, fig. 1-35.

⁵ N. Koçhan, M. Salvini, "A New Urartian Inscription from the Neighborhood of Muş", *SMEA*, XLII/2, 2000: 303-305, fig. 1-3; M. R. Payne, V. Sevin, "A New Urartian Inscription from Elazığ/Bahçecik, Eastern Turkey", *SMEA*, XLIII/1, 2001: 111-119, fig. 1-5; A. M. Dinçol,

Urartian King Menua from the Tehran museum,⁶ and now here is the inscription from Gilan, to be scrutinised below.

Gilan is one of the northern *ostans* (provinces) of the Islamic Republic of Iran, located on the southern coast of the Caspian, between the *ostans* of Mazandaran and Ardabil (the latter having been formerly part of the *ostan* of Eastern Azarbaijan). This region from the ancient times was predominantly populated by the tribes of Gels which retained their ethnic identity up until the first centuries of the Muslim domination of Iran. As reported by the Medieval Arab geographer Ibn-Hauqal, the Gels spoke a language differing from the other languages of the area including Persian and Armenian.⁷

At present the archaeological excavations in the province of Gilan (particularly, in Amlash and Marlik) showed the traces of a rather original and rich culture, which is known in the relevant literature as “the Amlash Culture”.⁸ The carriers of this culture were in close contact with the ancient population of the Armenian Highland and the adjacent areas, particularly during the times of the Urartian Empire.

As an important source for the study of the contacts between the peoples of the Caspian area and Urartu, besides the archaeological materials, should also be considered the cuneiform inscriptions found in the Caspian provinces of Iran⁹—among them the inscribed objects found in Gilan—two bronze horse blinkers, a horse-bit and a horse breastplate (umbo) excavated from the tombs in the Deylamān Moun-

B. Dinçol, M. Salvini, “Zwei Urartäische Tontafeln aus Çavuştepe”, *SMEA*, XLIII/2, 2001: 195-202; A. Çilingiroğlu, M. Salvini (eds.), *op. cit.*: 251-319; R. Bashash Khanzaq, R. Biscione, A.-R. Hejebri-Nobari, M. Salvini, “Haldi’s Garrison—Haldi’s Protection. The Newly Found Rock Inscription of Argisti II in Shisheh, Near Ahar (East Azerbaijan, Iran)”, *SMEA*, XLIII/1, 2001: 25-37; M. Salvini, “Una Stele di Rusa III Erimenahi dalla zona di Van”, *SMEA*, XLIV/1, 2002: 115-143, fig. 1-5. There is also information about an unpublished Urartian clay tablet inscribed on both sides, found at Yukarı (Upper) Anzaf fortress (see A. M. Greaves, B. Helwing, “Archaeology in Turkey: The Stone, Bronze & Iron Ages 2001”, *TÜBA-AR*, VI, 2003: 147).

⁶ M. Salvini, “Progetto Urartu. Iran-Teheran, Museo dell’Antico Iran”, *SMEA*, XLIV/2, 2002: 360-361.

⁷ *Vitae et regna. Discriptio ditionis moslemicae auctore Abu'l Kāsim Ibn Haukal*, ed. M. J. de Goeje, Lügdeni Batavorum, 1873 (Bibliotheca geographorum arabicorum, II): 268.

⁸ See, for example, E. O. Negahban, Marlik: The Complete Excavation Report (University Museum Monograph, 87), Philadelphia, 1996 (vol. 1: Text; vol. 2: Illustrations); R. H. Dyson, “Amlaš”, E. Yarshater (ed.), *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. I, 1985: 976.

⁹ Cf. the inscription of Sarduri II found in Sekindel, near the city of Varžakan in Karadagh Mountains, and three rock inscriptions of Argisti II from Razlıq, Nashteban and Shisheh, all of them in the territory of the Eastern Azerbaijan, adjoining Gilan (for details see N. Harutyunyan, *Korpus urartskix klinobraznyx nadpisej*, Erevan 2001, No 245, 409, 410; B. André-Salvini and M. Salvini, “The Urartian Rock Inscriptions of Razlıq and Naşteban (East Azerbaijan, Iran)”, *SMEA*, XLI/1, 1999: 17-32, fig. 1-10; R. Bashash Khanzaq, et al., *op. cit.*, *SMEA*, XLIII/1, 2001: 25-37). In general, the whole bulk of the Urartian inscriptions, including inscribed clay objects (tablets, storage jars etc.), found in the near Caspian areas of Iran counts more than fifty.

tains. The objects carry the names of the Urartian kings Menua and Argišti (I).¹⁰ These are the earliest Urartian documents of Gilan, of course, after the inscribed objects of Marlik.¹¹ In 1998 an expedition under Prof. Mohammad-Reza Khalatbari initiated active archaeological excavations in the *dehestans* of Maryan and Talesh, the mountainous regions of the *ostan* of Gilan. These *dehestans* are located in the north of Gilan at the slopes of the mountain Bogrov-dagh (*Gelmanc' ler* of the Armenian sources) spread on the area about 3472 km². The archaeological artefacts found during the excavations are dated in general from the mid-second millennium B. C. until the time of the Parthian Arshakides and the Persian Sasanids.¹²

Among the objects discovered from the ancient cemetery at Tul village in Talesh region during the 2002's excavation season it is also listed an interesting find—a copper bracelet bearing one-line inscription (see figure 1).¹³

The inscription is one-sided, carved on the inside surface of the bracelet. Incidentally, the bracelet had been formerly broken and was later riveted. The text is written in typical Urartian cuneiform representing one of well-known formulas of the Urartian epigraphy—a dedication (to the gods, to a city etc.). Moreover, the bracelet is unique among the metal objects carrying inscriptions of this type (shields, helmets, arrows, bells, bronze pedestals and candelabrum).¹⁴

The cuneiform text on the bracelet is poorly preserved: the autograph of Prof. M.-R. Khalatbari, the publisher of this object, and his interpretation allowed to read, perhaps, the fragment [^ma]r-giš-ti-ni-še uš-tú-[ni?]¹⁵ (no transliteration of the text is given).

In the autograph of the inscription our attention is primarily focused on the name of Argišti and on the form of its writing—^mArgišti-niše (!?). At first sight, the absence of the sign -hi-, indicating the pat-

¹⁰ R. Ghirshman, “Notes Iraniennes XIV: Deux œillères en bronze des rois d’Urartu”, *Artibus Asiae*, XXVII, 1964: 49-60, fig. 1-2; idem, “Notes Iraniennes XV: Deux bronzes des rois d’Urartu”, *Artibus Asiae*, XXVIII, 1966: 219-220; G. Tirac’yan, “Urartakan hnüt’yunner Iranum”, *Patma-banasirakan handes (PBH)*, No. 3 (1966): 291, fig. 2a/2b; N. Harutyunyan, *op. cit.*, No. 161a-d.

¹¹ It is already known that among the seals found at the cemetery of Marlik there are two examples carrying cuneiform texts. The signs, by the way, have an Old Babylonian shape (see for details E. O. Negahban, “The Seals of Marlik Tepe”, *JNES*, vol. 36, No. 2, 1977: 94; idem, “Seals of Marlik”, *Akten des VII Internationalen Kongresses für iranische Kunst und Archäologie*, München, 7-10, September, 1976, *AMII*, Erg. 6, Berlin, 1979: 108-137, 122-123).

¹² M.-R. Xal’atbari, *Kāvēshā-ye bāstānēšā-ye Gīlān: Tūl Talesh 1998-2003*, Rašt, 2003: 9.

¹³ “Kaš-e dastband-e 2800 sâle-ye Šâh Argišti”, *Irân*, 9th Year, No 2374: 18.

¹⁴ See, for example, O. Belli, “Inscribed Metal Objects”, *E. Merhaw (ed.)*, *Urartu: A Metalworking Center in the First Millennium B. C. E.*, Jerusalem, 1991: 43-49; etc.

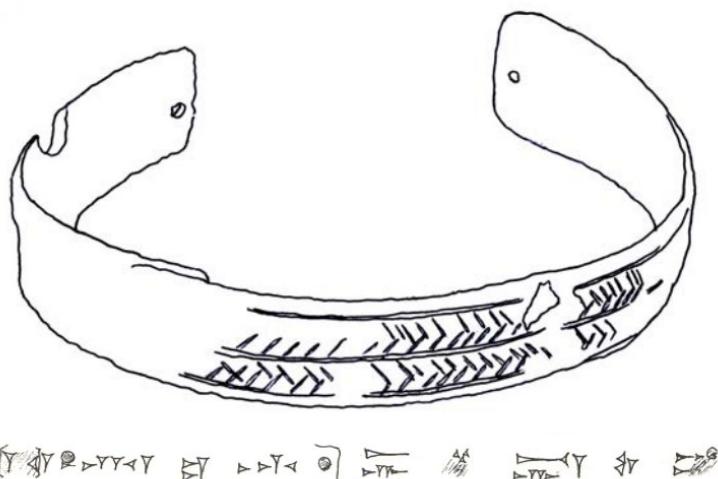


Figure 1.

ronymic ending in the word ^mArgištiniše (if it is a patronymic—*son of Argišti*), may seem strange. The Urartian epigraphy ignores this pattern of writing (cf. ^mArgištihiniše). If we had dealt with the proper name (of a king), we would have to explain the presence of a redundant symbol -ni- (cf. ^mArgištishi). In this case, however, what we deal with is probably a technical fault, rather than incorrect writing. As noted above, the bracelet had been riveted. In all probability, the prospective sign -hi- (perhaps, with preceded graphical -e-¹⁵) had been in the initial part of the second fragment of the bracelet. During the repairing this part was placed behind the ending of the first fragment—one on the other, thus escaping from the attention of the Iranian scholar (see below). The symbol -hi- missing in the autograph can be restored with assuredness, enabling us to determine the existence of a patronymic in the revised name of Argišti.

Thus, the bracelet could have been belonged either to Sarduri, son of Argišti (Sarduri II) or Rusa, son of Argišti (Rusa II),¹⁶ but in no way to a king named Argišti, as suggested by M.-R. Khalatbari leaning towards the candidacy of Argišti, son of Rusa (Argišti II).¹⁷

¹⁵ See N. Harutyunyan, *op. cit.*, Glossary: 479.

¹⁶ Judging from the shapes of the cuneiform signs one can think about the Sarduri II, son of Argišti I (see G. Wilhelm, “Bemerkungen zur urartäischen Paläographie”, *AoF*, 21/2, 1994: 352–358).

¹⁷ M.-R. Xal’atbarī, *op. cit.*: 9.

Further on, at the beginning of the inscription, the name of the God Ḫaldi has not been retained: the name of the supreme God of the Urartian pantheon is constantly present in all similar texts, though here one cannot eventually rule out the chance of another deity to be mentioned. It could have been associated with the changes implemented within the Urartian pantheon. In some Urartian texts the names of deities emerge that have not been included in the list of the Gods known from “Mheri duř” (Meher Kapisi), i. e. the God Iuarša (^di-(ú)-ár-šá-a), Goddess Aniqu (^da-ni-qu), Mesopotamian Marduk (^dAMAR-UTU), and Aššur (^daš-šur).¹⁸

As to the second part of the text, only the first two signs (uš and tú) are clearly visible.¹⁹ The Iranian scholar Rasul Bashash Khanzaq correctly reinstated the word uštuni “awarded, dedicated” (from the root ušt(u) “to send, to devote”). It should be noted that the preserved traces of the last, third sign shows little similarity with the sign -ni- (cf. in the same place with the -ni- in the patronymic of Argišti[ehi]niše). What seems here more probable is the restoration of the cuneiform sign -ú-, having in this case graphical significance, to be potentially followed by only the syllable -ni, which had not been retained in the fragment, i. e. uš-tú-[ú]-[ni]. This form of writing occurs in many specimens of the Urartian epigraphy.²⁰

Anyway, with regard to the above mentioned, the following transliteration can be suggested for the preserved fragment: [^ma]r-giš-ti-[e?-bi]-ni-še uš-tú-[ú?]-[ni (?)], while for the entire formula if we consider the known parallels of the Urartian epigraphy, perhaps, it could be the following: [^dhal-di-e EN ŠÚ (the version: ^dhal-di-e EN or ^dhal-di-e e-ú-ri-e) i-ni (?) ^ma]r-giš-ti-[e?-bi]-ni-še uš-tú-[ú?]-[ni?] “To (the God Ḫaldi, his Lord, this (object) (?), the son of Argišti dedicated”.²²

According to M.-R. Khalatbari, the mentioned document either attests the extension of the Urartian borders towards the western and north-western regions of Gilan, or the influence of the Urartian civili-

¹⁸ N. Harutyunyan, *op. cit.*, No 195-196; 1; 421: 21, 25; 424: 7, 8; 427: 8; M. Salvini, “Una Stele di Rusa III Erimenahí dalla zona di Van”, *SMEA*, XLIV/1, 2002, Vs.: 12, 21.

¹⁹ Unfortunately, the last, third sign in the autograph is damaged, and the image of the bracelet cited in M.-R. Khalatbari’s study yields no clarification (M.-R. Xal’atbarī, *op. cit.*: 15).

²⁰ N. Harutyunyan, *op. cit.*, Glossary: 474.

²¹ The Urartian inscriptions of this kind commonly mention the dedicatory object, either shield—(in) aše, helmet—(in) kubuše or any other object. So, the restoration of the word combination *ini...—this (object)* in the formula is possible. However, it is eventually not very essential, since we do not know the phonetic equivalent of the word for “bracelet”.

²² In many dedicatory inscriptions we can see the expression ulgušiјani edini with the meaning of *(for) his life*. On the other hand it is difficult to judge about the existence of this expression also in our inscription.

sation upon the indicated territories. The probability of the existence of the Urartian Empire's political power over the territories of the present-day Gilan is very low indeed. Another question, however, is the probability of cultural influence and of interrelations in different spheres and levels. By the way, M.-R. Khalatbari draws parallels between the ancient culture of the valley of Kargan-rud river in the Gilan Province and the cultures of the Urartian Empire and the Mannean kingdom.²³

We can pause here by only noting the visible influence of the Urartian civilisation upon the Old Persian (Achaemenid) culture, the effect perhaps dating back to the times of the Median principalities. That question, despite the available publications,²⁴ requires a complex investigation.

²³ M.-R. Kal'atbarī, *op. cit.*: 7.

²⁴ See in details: R. Ghirshman, “La civilisation achéménide et l’Urartu, *W. B. Henning, E. Yarshater (eds.), A Lacust’s Leg: Studies in Honour of S. Taqizadeh*, London, 1962: 85-88; G. Tirac'yan, “Urartakan k‘ayak‘akrt‘ut‘yuna yev Ak‘emenyan Iran”, *PBH*, No 2 (25), 1964: 149-164; I. M. Diakonoff, “The Origin of the ‘Old Persian’ Writing System and the Ancient Oriental Epigraphic and Annalistic Traditions”, *M. Boyce, I. Gershevitch (eds.), W. B. Henning Memorial Volume*, London, 1970: 120ff; S. Hmayakyan, “Urarta-hay-iranakan mšakut‘ayin p’oxařnč‘ut‘yunner”, *Iran-Namē*, No. 2 (14-15), 1993: 33; U. Seidl, “Achaemenidische Entlehnungen aus der urartäischen Kultur”, H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, A. Kuhrt and M. Cool Root (eds.), *Achaemenid History VIII. Continuity and Change, Proceedings of the Last Achaemenid History Workshop*, Leiden, 1994: 107-129; etc.

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